



Specialty Agriculture

Newsletter

Summer 2007

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Many consumers believe that locally grown, fresh produce is more nutritious than produce which has been stored and shipped long distances.

The Benefits OF BUYING LOCAL

By: Charles Green, Office of Agribusiness Development

The public and the media are increasingly aware of issues regarding food safety, nutrition, and the environmental impact of our food production and distribution system. Consumers want to make food choices that are the healthiest: for themselves, their families, and the environment. One of the healthiest choices a consumer can make when it comes to food purchases is buying local.

Many definitions of "local" abound. My definition is any farm product or processed food product which is grown, harvested, or produced within Virginia. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) enthusiastically supports local agricultural products through programs such as Virginia Grown and Virginia's Finest, which help consumers identify local products.

Consumers have a variety of reasons for wanting locally-grown foods. Some believe they are fresher, more nutritious and taste better than foods which must travel a long distance. Some consumers have a greater sense of confidence when buying from a local farmer and others may buy locally-produced foods because they are concerned with the environmental impact of food hauling.

Purchasing Virginia-grown foods can boost a local economy by helping to keep sales dollars circulating within a community. A recent study indicates that shifting just 1% of consumer expenditures to direct purchasing of local food products could increase farmers' income in that state by as much as 5%. Purchasing local farm products is also a way for Virginians to help maintain greenspace. Buying locally-grown foods helps maintain the economic viability of our family farms and therefore ensures that valuable farmland remains in agricultural production.

In order to support a truly local food system, Virginia farmers must produce a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, meat, poultry, and dairy products. VDACS works with farmers to plan for diversification. Through a Specialty Agriculture Initiative, VDACS works to provide high-value production alternatives by promoting the advancement and adoption of specialty agriculture production systems. In the past two years, VDACS has funded research projects that include: season extension in strawberries, specialty pepper and tomatillo production, high-value wheat varieties, protected culture cherry production, vegetable soybean production, organic peanut production, specialty pork management and production, and several other projects. All of these projects focus on increasing the value of local products available in the marketplace.

There are many options for consumers who want to buy local product. Several grocery chains have adopted buy local campaigns and the marketing staff at VDACS
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Virginia Grown

FRESH FROM LOCAL FARMERS

By: Cathy Belcher, Office of Direct Marketing

Fresh. Local. Close to home. Incredible flavor. That's Virginia Grown. The 2007 promotional campaign theme, Virginia Grown — Fresh from Local Farmers, will encourage consumers statewide to think local to get the freshest, best tasting products. These Virginia Grown products are available at farms, roadside stands and farmers markets.

You can join in on the promotion by proudly displaying Virginia Grown point-of-sale materials, such as banners and price cards, at your farm or market to identify fresh, local products. The Office of Direct Marketing Services has a number of other Virginia Grown items available, such as nutritional information brochures and posters, recipes, and, in limited quantities, fans, aprons, dry-erase boards, and tote bags. For an order form, visit the Web site at www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing/dms.shtml and look for the Virginia Grown POS Order Form under Grower and Marketer Services.

How about some free advertising dollars? If you use the Virginia Grown logo in your advertising, on your promotional brochures and flyers, or on signage, VDACS will reimburse 50 percent of your costs up to \$500. For more information and the Advertising Allocation form, contact Cathy Belcher, Direct Marketing Program Manager, at cathy.belcher@vdacs.virginia.gov.

BUYING LOCAL

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works with retailers to support Virginia farmers and processors. Shoppers can look for the Virginia Grown or Virginia's Finest label on products or should ask a store manager about local products.

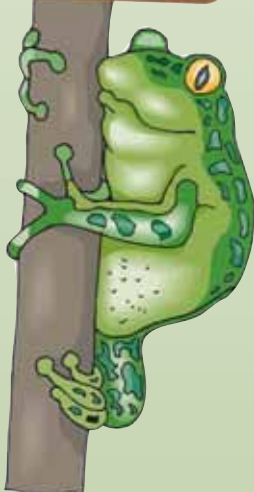
Direct marketing is becoming popular for farmers and consumers because it is based on a personal, one-to-one relationship that ties farmers and consumers together. Direct marketing channels include road-side stands, pick-your-own operations, farmers markets, internet sales, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs). By selling directly to consumers, as much as 80 cents of each food dollar goes right to the farmer.

Farmers markets may be the best known direct marketing channel. The VDACS Web site lists 100 farmers markets across the Commonwealth, and the Advertising Allocation Program (see article above) assists growers and marketers with advertising and promotion costs.

Community Supported Agriculture groups are another way for consumers to create a relationship with a farm. Many farms offer subscriptions where buyers receive a regular basket of produce, flowers, fruits, eggs, or other farm products. There are nearly 50 known CSAs operating in Virginia.

Some consumers enjoy visiting the farm and picking their own products right out of the field. *The Virginia Grown Guide to Pick-Your-Own and Select-Your-Own Farm Products* lists farms and farmers markets across the state.

Buying local farm and food products is a healthy choice. Local farm products are nutritious and supporting local farmers helps support local economies, conserve natural resources, and promote farmland preservation.



Angels OF AGRICULTURE

By: Keith Tignor, State Apiarist

As the sun begins to rise, a farmer surveys his crop. The weather has been agreeable, the right mix of sunlight and rain. Germination rates were high and the fields are full and ready for working. But without proper help it will be hard to turn a profit, perhaps even avoid a loss, for the season. Finding enough workers for his fields will be difficult. The farmer estimates that 1 million to 2 million workers are needed to do the job right. Loss of workers over the past several years has hindered fulfilling such a large contract. In-state sources for these workers are becoming hard to find, and out-of-state workers may need to be called in for the job. After many phone calls, a deal is made and the workers will be on their way after nightfall from Henry County, Virginia.

Throughout early spring and into the middle of summer this is a common scenario in the agricultural community. The migrant workers are not two but six-legged, and they have wings. Their homes are compact and hold tens of thousands of individuals. They can be moved hundreds of miles over night to an orchard or field where they are needed. While clumsily flying from blossom to blossom in search of nectar, they pick up and deposit small granules of pollen. Their work is completed months before any harvest. But without them, there will be fewer apples, peaches, strawberries, beans, watermelons, cantaloupes, pumpkins, and a host of other crops to harvest. They are honey bees, the Angels of Agriculture.

Most people visualize a jar of honey on the breakfast table when thinking of honey bees. But the true value of honey bees is in transporting pollen for fruits and vegetables rather than in gathering nectar to make honey. When honey bees collect pollen as food for their young, they inadvertently transfer some pollen between blossoms. In doing so, they fertilize the flowers to produce seeds in fruits and vegetables. The more seeds produced, the larger and more uniform the fruit. Approximately 80 percent of all insect crop pollination is attributed to the honey bee. In fact, one in every three mouthfuls of our food is the result of honey bees pollinating our fruit, vegetable, and nut crops.

The real profit in pollination and beekeeping is in fruit and vegetable production. The value of honey bee pollination in the United States is \$15 billion through increased production and market value of crops. Compare this with an annual \$150 million in honey production for beekeepers. After as few as half a dozen visits by a honey bee, a flower will produce fruit. Properly pollinated flowers produce more seeds. The resulting fruit or vegetable surrounding the seeds will be rounder and more uniform. The better the pollination, the better the quality and quantity of fruit and vegetables. This results in a better price and more profit for the farmer with minimal work required on the farmer's part. The honey bees do all the hard work. The farmer only needs to have a source to obtain these hard working and dedicated insects. Unfortunately, sources for honey bees are getting fewer.

Over the past 20 years, changes in demographics, loss of habitat, and introduction of exotic pests have reduced the number of beekeepers and honey bees in the United States. The art of beekeeping is being lost as our society moves further from a farming community to seek service-oriented careers. Pesticide sprays for mosquito and lawn pest control can be toxic to honey bees and other pollinators. New development is taking the place of our forests and farmland. International trade has resulted in the introduction of mite and insect pests of the honey bee to the United States. And a new affliction, called Colony Collapse Disorder, has threatened honey bees in the past year. As a result, the number of bee hives in Virginia has dropped from 90,000 to less than 30,000 since 1985. The number of beekeepers has

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Summer AG Trivia

Corn can be traced back to Mexican or central American cultures as early as 3400 B.C.

(Source: www.foodreference.com)

The first recorded watermelon harvest occurred nearly 5,000 years ago in Egypt.

(Source: www.fabulousfoods.com)

Eight medium-sized strawberries contain 140% of the U.S. RDA for Vitamin C.

(Source: www.pickyourown.org)





Angels OF AGRICULTURE

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decreased by 50 percent over the same time period. Farmers are finding it harder to locate beekeepers willing and able to move hives for pollination purposes, or they are trying to get by without honey bees to pollinate their crops.

VDACS is working to turn the tide in this loss of Virginia's honey bee resources. Apiary inspectors in the Office of Plant and Pest Services work closely with beekeepers to improve the health and productivity of hives. VDACS coordinates beekeeping classes with local beekeeping organizations and the Virginia State Beekeepers Association (VSBA). The VDACS Web site maintains a list of beekeepers offering pollination services and farmers in need of honey bees for pollination of their crops through the Virginia Pollinator Program. And, a recently completed agency study on the plight of beekeepers in Virginia identified several programs that could benefit beekeepers and improve honey bee resources.

Recruiting new beekeepers is one of the goals of the Apiary Inspection Program at VDACS. Perhaps the best advantage in becoming a beekeeper is the potential for huge rewards with little input. Just like pollination, the bees do the work of caring for their young, building and maintaining their home, and producing honey. One hive typically produces 60 pounds of extra honey for the beekeeper and can pollinate 2 acres of farmland. Only a small financial investment to purchase hive equipment and bees is needed to get started in beekeeping. The time commitment for keeping bees is also minor compared to other animals. Most beekeepers make short monthly visits to check on their hives' status, add comb for honey storage, or remove honey for themselves. For more information on getting started in beekeeping, contact VDACS at 804/786-3515, send an email to VABEES@vdacs.virginia.gov, or visit the VSBA Web site at www.virginiabeekeepers.org.

Calendar of Events

July 18, 2007

Income Opportunities Through Cut-Flower Production and No-Till Vegetable Production Field Day
Dayspring Farm in Cologne, VA

August 14, 2007

Organic Vegetable Production Field Day
Kentland Agricultural Research Farm in Blacksburg, VA

September 8, 2007

Heritage Harvest Festival
Monticello's Tufton Farm

September 27-29, 2007

Natural Products Expo East
Baltimore, MD

November 2-4, 2007

American Livestock Breeders Conservancy Conference
Sanford, NC

November 16-17, 2007

Virginia Aquaculture Conference
Williamsburg, VA

December 11-12, 2007

Virginia Agriculture Summit
Abingdon, VA

January 16-19, 2008

Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group Conference
Louisville, KY

Contact US

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BENCHMARKING YOUR PRICES

Have you wondered what prices other farmers are getting for their farm products?

The Virginia Market News Service (VMNS) collects and disseminates daily agriculture market prices and analyses for Virginia producers, sellers, and the media. Producers can view market price data provided by VMNS on the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Web site, at <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketnews>. Virginia Market News Service is a cooperative program of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The New Farm Organic Price Index is a Web-based tool that "tracks selected prices from the fruit, vegetable, herbs and grain sectors, comparing organic prices to conventional prices in markets across the country." The Organic Price Index can be found at <http://newfarm.org/opx/>. The Web site was developed by the Rodale Institute, a non-profit organization which supports innovative organic agricultural research, training, outreach and education.

Historical organic farmgate and wholesale price data for selected products are also available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (USDA ERS). This data is accessible online at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/OrganicPrices/>